

KALE

One of the Best Stories Ever Written by Don Marquis

"SE that old fellow there?" asked Ed the waiter. Well, his fad is money."

The old fellow indicated—

he must have been nearly eighty—sat, eating corned beef and cabbage, in a little booth in a certain delightful, greasy, old chophouse in downtown New York. It was nearly time to close the chophouse for that day, for it was almost 11 o'clock at night; it was nearly time to close the chophouse forever, for it was the middle of June, 1919. In a couple of weeks the war-time prohibition act would be in force, and Ed and I had been discussing what effect it would have upon our respective lives.

There was no one else in the place at the time except the cashier and the old man whose fad was money, and so Ed had condescended toward me, as a faithful customer, and was sitting down to have a drink with me.

"His fad is money?" I questioned, glancing at the old gentleman, who seemed to be nothing extraordinary as regards face or manner or attire. He had a long, bony New Englandish head and a short, white, well-trimmed beard; he was finishing his nowise delicate food with gusto. "I should say," I added, "that his fad was corned beef and cabbage."

"That's one of his fads," admitted Ed the waiter, "and I don't know but that it's as strong in him as his money fad. At any rate, I've never seen him without one or the other was near him, and both in large quantities."

We had been conversing in a mumble, so that our voices should not carry to the old gentleman. And now Ed dropped his voice still lower and whispered:

"That's Old Man Singleton."

I looked at him with a renewed interest. Every one knew Old Man Singleton was, and many persons liked to guess how much he was worth. Obviously he had retired, leaving to his two sons the management of the Singleton banking business, with its many ramifications, but actually he kept his interest in the concern, and was not averse to coaching his grandsons in the ways of the world, and especially that part of the world known as "the street."

STARTING out as a New England village, who hated poverty because his family had always known it, he had come to New York as a lad of twenty, with red knitted mittens on his osseous hands, and he had at once removed the mittens and put the hands to work gathering money; it was rumored that the hands had never turned loose any of the garnered coin; it was even said by some persons that he still had the same pair of mittens. The details of his rise I cannot give; he had achieved his ambition to be one of the very rich men of America because the ambition was so strong within him.

"Of course his fad is money," I muttered to Ed the waiter. "Everybody knows that Old Man Singleton's fad is money."

Ed was about to reply, when Mr. Singleton looked up and motioned for his check. Ed brought it, and gave the old gentleman his hat and stick and his change.

"I hope everything was all right, Mr. Singleton," said Ed, palpably bidding for recognition and a tip.

"Eh?" said Singleton, looking blankly at Ed. "You know me, hey? I don't recall you. Yes, everything was all right, thank you. He gave the waiter a dime and passed out, after another blank, fumbling look at Ed, and a shake of his head. There was something feeble and wandering in the old fellow's manner; his memory was going; it was obvious that before long the rest of him would follow his memory."

Ed shouldn't be allowed to go around this way alone at night," murmured Ed, watching the door through which he had made his exit. "But I suppose he's as bull-headed as ever about doing what he pleases, even if his legs are shaky."

"He didn't know you," I hinted, for I wished to learn all that he knew about Old Man Singleton.

Ed is a person who has been in the world nearly fifty years; he has had some very unusual acquaintances and experiences. It is never safe to predict just what Ed will know and what he will not know. One afternoon, after I had known Ed for about a year, I was attempting to argue some scientific point with a friend who was lunching with me, and Ed, who was waiting on us and listening, remarked: "I beg your pardon, sir, but it wasn't 'The Descent of Man' that Darwin said that; it was 'The Origin of Species'."

And yet, if you deduce from that remark that Ed knows a great deal about modern science, you will be mistaken; as likely as not he could quote pages of Marcus Aurelius to you, and at the same time he might pronounce "Euripides" as if the last two syllables were one, rining with "hides"; his reading, like his life, has been eclectic.

"He doesn't recall you," I repeated. "And that's ingratitude," said Ed, "if he only knew it. I saved the old man's life once."

And Ed limped over to the table and resumed his seat opposite me. He has a bullet under one kneecap, and at times it makes him very lame. He would never tell me how it came there; to this day I do not know.

"From what did you save his life?" I asked.

"From a man," said Ed moodily.

"From a man who had a notion to beat him one night. And to this day I ask myself, 'Did I do right, or did I do wrong?'"

"Tell me about it," I insisted.

"Drink up," said Ed, manipulating the Scotch bottle and the siphon of another. "This is one of the last high balls you'll ever have, unless you sneak around and take it on the sly. I don't know that I should have another one myself; it settles in this damned knee of mine if I get a little too much."

"Tell me when, where and how you knew old man Singleton," I demanded again.

"This knee of mine," went on Ed, disregarding me, "is a hell of a handicap. We were talking about prohibition—what's prohibition going to do to me? Hey? It puts me out of a barroom like this the first time. And what else can I do? With this game leg, you can see me going on like a Russian dancer, but this one did. His New York

house is uptown, between the sixties and eighties, east of the park, and he wants it kept so he can drop into it with his family and a flock of servants at any hour of the day or night, from any part of the earth, without a minute's notice, and give a dinner party at once, if he feels like it, and he frequently feels like it.

"It was Mrs. Hodgkins and Larry's job to keep the fires from going out in the boilers, so to speak, and a head of steam on so that the domestic help could sail in any direction on receipt of orders by wire, wireless or telephone. They were permanent there, but Jake Hergshimer and his family, as far as I could make out, never got more than an average of about three months' use a year out of that mansion."

"This time I am speaking of was nearly ten years ago. I was a waiter in an uptown restaurant, and both my legs were good then; Larry and I were old pals. The Jake Hergshimer was sailing around the world in a yacht, and would be at it for about a year, as far as Larry knew, and he asked me up to live with him. I accepted; and believe me, the eight months I put in as Jake Hergshimer's guest were some eight months. Not that Jake knew about it, but if he had known it, he wouldn't have cared. This Jake was a real human being."

"And his clothes fit me; just as if I had been measured for them. He had what you might call an automatic tailor, Jake did. Every six weeks, rain or shine, that tailor delivered a new suit of clothes to the Hergshimer house, and he sent in his bill once a year, so Larry, the butler, forgot to stop the milk, and when Jake sailed for the other side of the world he forgot to tell anybody to stop the tailor. Larry didn't feel as if it were any part of his duty to stop him; for Larry liked that tailor. He made Larry's clothes, too."

"AND I didn't see where it was up to me to protest. As I said, Jake's garments might have been made for me. In fact, a great many of them were made for me. There were at least fifteen suits of clothes that had never been worn in that house, made to my measure and Jake's, when I became butler's companion in the establishment, and they kept right on coming. Also there was a standing order for orchestra seats at the Metropolitan. Jake had a box every second Thursday, or something like that, but when he really wanted to hear the music and see the show he usually sat in the orchestra. Not only did his business suits fit me, but his dress clothes fit me, too."

"I used to go often with a lady's maid that had the same access to clothing as I did. She was part of a caretaking staff also. Being a writing person, you have, of course, only viewed New York's society and near-society from the outside, and no doubt you have been intimidated by the haughty manners of the servants. Well, when you get close to swells and really know them personally, you will find they are human, too."

came a millionaire, down here in New York city. He was tickled to see her and he didn't care a darn if she was Jake Hergshimer's housekeeper. She could cook cabbage and kale better than any one else in the world and he used to come and sit with her and talk about that little old town up there and indulge in his favorite dissipation.

"Old Man Singleton has had what you call the social entree in New York for a good many years, for so long that some of his children and all of his grandchildren were born with it. But he never took it very seriously himself. He has been an in-and-outer, you might say. If he saw Mrs. Hodgkins around Jake's house he would call her Mary and ask her how folks were up home in front of Jake and his wife and a whole bunch of ruests, just as soon as not. And his sons and his daughters and his grandchildren never could get him out of those ways; he always was bullheaded about doing what he pleased, so Mrs. Hodgkins told me, and he always will be. And the old lady liked to see him and chin with him and cook for him; and, believe me, she was some cook when she set herself to it. Not merely kale, but everything. She didn't cook for the Hergshimers—they had a chef for that—but they missed it by not having her. Victuals was old Mary's middle name, and she could rustle up some of the best grub you ever threw your lip over."

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"AND then, one night, I discovered what Old Man Singleton's fad was—kale. Money. Big money. Big money on his person. It was his way; Larry and I wanted to go downtown and have a little fun, but neither of us had any cash in hand. Larry had a check for \$150, which Jake Hergshimer had sent him, but all the tradesmen we knew were closed at that hour and there wasn't any way to cash it, unless Old Man Singleton could."

"Mr. Singleton," says Larry to the old man, who was sitting down to a mess of pork and kale with Mrs. Hodgkins, "maybe you can cash this for me?" And he handed him the check.

"The old man stopped eating and put his glasses on and pulled a bill folder out of his pocket with a kind of a pleased smile on his face.

"Let me see," he says, taking out the bills and running them over with his fingers; let me see."

"I nearly dropped dead. There wasn't a bill in there of lower denomination than one thousand dollars, and the most of them were ten-thousand-dollar bills.

"No, Larry," says the old man, "I'm afraid I can't, afraid I can't—haven't got the change."

"And while we stood there and looked, he smoothed and patted those bills, and folded and refolded them, and then put them back into his pocket and patted the pocket."

"Mary," he says to the old woman, "let's go. That's quite a lot of money for little Lemuel Singleton to be carrying around in his pocket, ain't it?"

"It is that, Lemuel," said the old

were at our service, and he never questioned a bill, Larry said. There were twelve or fifteen hand-picked servants in our little social circle that year, and before I left there I could begin to understand how these debutantes feel at the end of the season—sort of tired and bored and willing to relax and go in for work and rest and athletics for a change."

"I had only been the butler's companion for a few weeks when Old Man Singleton dropped in one evening—yes, sir, old Lemuel Singleton himself. He came to see the butler's mother, Mrs. Hodgkins. He had known her a good many years before, when he was wearing those red mittens and sawing wood up in that New England town, and she was somebody's Irish cook. And he had run across her again, after he be-

lady, and I should think you'd be afraid of leaving it out of the bank."

"Well, Mary," says the old man, "I kind of like to have it round me all the time—uh-huh!—a little bit where I can put my hands on it, all the time. I used to carry gold, but I gave that up; it's too heavy for what it's worth. But I like it, Mary; I used to look at that gold and say to myself: 'Well, there's one thing you got, Lem Singleton, they never thought you'd get when you left home! And they aren't going to take it away from you, either!' It was a long time before I could make paper seem as real to me as gold. But it does now."

"And what does the old bird do but take it out of his pocket again and crinkle it through his fingers and smooth it out again and pet it?"

"One night, when they had been gassing for a while, they sort of got my goat, and I said to him: 'Mr. Singleton, does it ever strike you as a little peculiar that you should have so much money and so many other people, such as myself, none at all?' 'No, Ed," he says. 'No, it doesn't. That's the Lord's way. Ed! Money is given as a sacred trust by the Lord to them that are best fitted to have and to hold.' 'Meaning,' I asked him, 'that if you were ever to let loose of any of it, it might work harm in the world?' 'He chuckled over that for quite a while, as if he saw something personal in it, and he gave me a ten-dollar bill for a Christmas present. He isn't as stingy as some people says

thing from Jake Hergshimer's collection—just one little tap on the old man's head, and down he goes, and he's got anywhere from one hundred thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in his clothes."

"Yes," said myself to me, "one little tap, and maybe you kill him. What then? The electric chair, huh?"

"Hell!" I said to myself. "Take a chance! The old man has so much money that what he has in his pocket means nothing to him one way or another. Larry's gone till morning, and the old woman won't wake for a long time. It means a little bit of a headache for Old Lem here, and it means your chance to lead an honest life hereafter and be a useful citizen and take care of those you have been neglecting."

"Yes," said myself to me, "it's more moral to do it, and make your life over, but you never have been one for morality in the past. Besides, you'd kill him."

"And I might have killed him, boss. I wasn't sure of it, then, but I've been sure of it since then. I was that strung up that I would have hit too hard."

"And yet, I might not have done so; I might have just hit him just enough to put him out and make my getaway, and I might have led an honest life since then."

"But at the moment I couldn't do it. I saw, all of a sudden, something funny. I saw the old man stamping his feet and getting the snow off, and I thought of him as a dead man, and I says to myself, 'How damned funny for a dead man to stamp the snow off his feet?' And I laughed."

"Heh? Heh? What did you say, Ed?" says the old man, and turns around.

"I dropped the iron bar to my side, and that dead man came up out of the grave."

"Nothing, Mr. Singleton," I said. "I was just going to say, go on in, and I'll get a brush and clean the snow off of you."

"He went on in, and I barred the grille and locked the door, and we went on down to the dining rooms. I was shaking, and still I wasn't easy in my mind. I told him there wasn't anybody home but me, and he said he'd take a drop of Jake's brandy. And while I was opening a bottle of it for him, what does he do but pull out that billfold."

"For God's sake, Mr. Singleton," I said, turning weak and sitting down in a chair all of a sudden, "put that money up."

"He sat there and sipped his brandy and talked, but I didn't hear what he was saying. I just looked at him and kept saying to myself, should I have done it? Or should I have let him go by?"

"Boss, that was nearly ten years ago, and I've been asking myself that question from time to time ever since. Should I have done it? Was it moral to refuse that chance to make my life over again? You know me, kid. You know some of me, at least. You know I don't hold much by morals. If I was to tell you how I got that bullet under my kneecap, you'd know me better than you do. If I had hit him just right and made my getaway I would have led a different life."

"AND I wouldn't now be waiting for my death sentence. For that's practically what this prohibition thing means to me. I can't work

he is; he just looks so stinky that if he was the most liberal man on earth he would get the reputation of being stinky."

"The lady's maid that I used to go to the opera with quit me a little while after Christmas. She and I were walking around the promenade between the acts one night at the Metropolitan and Larry was with us, when a fellow stopped Larry and spoke to him. I could see the guy looking at the girl and me as he and Larry talked. Later Larry told me that it was one of Jake Hergshimer's friends, and he had been a little bit surprised to see Larry at the opera all diked out, and he had wanted to know who the girl was."

"Well, anyhow, she never went to the opera with me after that; but a few weeks later I saw her at a cabaret with Jake's friend. It was grief to me; but I got into some real trouble, or let it get into me, about the same time, and that helped take the sting off. I had once been married—but there's no use going into all that. Anyhow, when the marriage kind of wore off, my own folks took my wife's side of the case and she went to live with them. My old dad was sick, and they needed money, and my wife wrote to me that she was willing to let bygones be bygones and accept some money from me, and that my parents felt the same way, and there was a kid, too, that my folks were bringing up."

"Well, I was desperate for some way to get hold of some cash and send to them. In the end I took one of Jake Hergshimer's silver vases and, hocked it, and sent the money, and got it out of hock two or three months later; but in the meantime there was a spell when I was so hard pressed I looked to me like I would actually have to do something dishonest to get that money."

"One night, before Jake Hergshimer came to my rescue and lent me that silver vase, if you want to call it that, I was sitting alone in the house, thinking what a failure in life I was, and how rotten it was to have a wife and kid and parents all set against me, and drinking some of Jake's good booze, and getting more and more low in my mind, when there came a ring at the front door bell. The butler was out, and old Mary was asleep 'way up in the top of the house, at the back, and wouldn't hear."

"Old Man Singleton myself, that's Jake Hergshimer, I said, after that we got better acquainted, the old man said to me, 'I paid more attention to him. He interested me more. I've always been interested in science of all kinds, and the year I spent in Jake Hergshimer's house I cut the leaves of a lot of books in his library and gave them the once over. I was always interested in psychology, even before the word got to be a headline in the Sunday supplements, and I took a good deal of pleasure that winter trying to get inside of old man Singleton's mind. I must say, I never got very far in, at that. My general conclusion at the end is what it was at the beginning—his fad is kale."

"And he loved to show it, you could see that. Not that he pulled it every time he happened to be at one of our parties. Often he would drop in that winter from some swell social event at one of the big houses uptown, where he had been a guest, and eat some of old Mary's chow, and never intimate by word or look that he had all that kale on him. And then again he'd come along, as diked out in the soup and fish, and flash the roll, for no other reason that I know except he enjoyed seeing us get the blind staggers, which we always did. And then he'd fuss with it and get it and go into a dream over it, and wake up again and grin and talk about life, and you never heard two more moral persons exchange views. It was sometimes as good as a Sunday school to listen to them for half an hour."

"I'll bet," I said to myself, "that I thought I'd better go and let him in. I didn't have any ulterior notions when I went up the stairs from the servants' dining room and made for the front door. But the minute I clapped eyes on him I thought of all that kale in his pocket."

"I opened the front door, but outside of that was an iron grille. It had a number of fastenings, but the final one was a short, heavy iron bar that lay in two sockets, one on each side of the opening."

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"It is that, Lemuel," said the old

he is; he just looks so stinky that if he was the most liberal man on earth he would get the reputation of being stinky."

"The lady's maid that I used to go to the opera with quit me a little while after Christmas. She and I were walking around the promenade between the acts one night at the Metropolitan and Larry was with us, when a fellow stopped Larry and spoke to him. I could see the guy looking at the girl and me as he and Larry talked. Later Larry told me that it was one of Jake Hergshimer's friends, and he had been a little bit surprised to see Larry at the opera all diked out, and he had wanted to know who the girl was."

"Well, anyhow, she never went to the opera with me after that; but a few weeks later I saw her at a cabaret with Jake's friend. It was grief to me; but I got into some real trouble, or let it get into me, about the same time, and that helped take the sting off. I had once been married—but there's no use going into all that. Anyhow, when the marriage kind of wore off, my own folks took my wife's side of the case and she went to live with them. My old dad was sick, and they needed money, and my wife wrote to me that she was willing to let bygones be bygones and accept some money from me, and that my parents felt the same way, and there was a kid, too, that my folks were bringing up."

"Well, I was desperate for some way to get hold of some cash and send to them. In the end I took one of Jake Hergshimer's silver vases and, hocked it, and sent the money, and got it out of hock two or three months later; but in the meantime there was a spell when I was so hard pressed I looked to me like I would actually have to do something dishonest to get that money."

"One night, before Jake Hergshimer came to my rescue and lent me that silver vase, if you want to call it that, I was sitting alone in the house, thinking what a failure in life I was, and how rotten it was to have a wife and kid and parents all set against me, and drinking some of Jake's good booze, and getting more and more low in my mind, when there came a ring at the front door bell. The butler was out, and old Mary was asleep 'way up in the top of the house, at the back, and wouldn't hear."

"Old Man Singleton myself, that's Jake Hergshimer, I said, after that we got better acquainted, the old man said to me, 'I paid more attention to him. He interested me more. I've always been interested in science of all kinds, and the year I spent in Jake Hergshimer's house I cut the leaves of a lot of books in his library and gave them the once over. I was always interested in psychology, even before the word got to be a headline in the Sunday supplements, and I took a good deal of pleasure that winter trying to get inside of old man Singleton's mind. I must say, I never got very far in, at that. My general conclusion at the end is what it was at the beginning—his fad is kale."

"And he loved to show it, you could see that. Not that he pulled it every time he happened to be at one of our parties. Often he would drop in that winter from some swell social event at one of the big houses uptown, where he had been a guest, and eat some of old Mary's chow, and never intimate by word or look that he had all that kale on him. And then again he'd come along, as diked out in the soup and fish, and flash the roll, for no other reason that I know except he enjoyed seeing us get the blind staggers, which we always did. And then he'd fuss with it and get it and go into a dream over it, and wake up again and grin and talk about life, and you never heard two more moral persons exchange views. It was sometimes as good as a Sunday school to listen to them for half an hour."

"I'll bet," I said to myself, "that I thought I'd better go and let him in. I didn't have any ulterior notions when I went up the stairs from the servants' dining room and made for the front door. But the minute I clapped eyes on him I thought of all that kale in his pocket."

"I opened the front door, but outside of that was an iron grille. It had a number of fastenings, but the final one was a short, heavy iron bar that lay in two sockets, one on each side of the opening."

"I lifted the bar and swung the grille open."

"AND THEY AIN'T GOING TO TAKE IT AWAY FROM ME, EITHER!"

came a millionaire, down here in New York city. He was tickled to see her and he didn't care a darn if she was Jake Hergshimer's housekeeper. She could cook cabbage and kale better than any one else in the world and he used to come and sit with her and talk about that little old town up there and indulge in his favorite dissipation.

"Old Man Singleton has had what you call the social entree in New York for a good many years, for so long that some of his children and all of his grandchildren were born with it. But he never took it very seriously himself. He has been an in-and-outer, you might say. If he saw Mrs. Hodgkins around Jake's house he would call her Mary and ask her how folks were up home in front of Jake and his wife and a whole bunch of ruests, just as soon as not. And his sons and his daughters and his grandchildren never could get him out of those ways; he always was bullheaded about doing what he pleased, so Mrs. Hodgkins told me, and he always will be. And the old lady liked to see him and chin with him and cook for him; and, believe me, she was some cook when she set herself to it. Not merely kale, but everything. She didn't cook for the Hergshimers—they had a chef for that—but they missed it by not having her. Victuals was old Mary's middle name, and she could rustle up some of the best grub you ever threw your lip over."

"At first Old Man Singleton and Mrs. Hodgkins didn't mix much with us younger folks when we pulled a party. It wasn't that we were too aristocratic for them, for off duty, as I said before, butlers and other swells can be as easy and jolly as common people. But they seemed too antiquated, if you get me; they were living too much in the past."

"AND then, one night, I discovered what Old Man Singleton's fad was—kale. Money. Big money. Big money on his person. It was his way; Larry and I wanted to go downtown and have a little fun, but neither of us had any cash in hand. Larry had a check for \$150, which Jake Hergshimer had sent him, but all the tradesmen we knew were closed at that hour and there wasn't any way to cash it, unless Old Man Singleton could."

"Mr. Singleton," says Larry to the old man, who was sitting down to a mess of pork and kale with Mrs. Hodg